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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF MILITARY HISTORY
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20 OCT 1972

Mr. Lawrence K. White
Executive Director
Central Intelligence Agency
Langley, Virginia 23365

Dear Mr. White:

One of our historians, Dr. Ronald Spector, has completed a monograph on the subject of the United States Army in Indo-China 1942-1945.

This monograph was originally intended for internal use but in view of the current interest in the subject the office is considering publication of the monograph. Since Dr. Spector utilized a small number of O.S.S. documents held by the Central Intelligence Agency we would appreciate receiving an informal opinion from you on any security problems which might be involved in publication of the monograph.

Sincerely,

1 Incl
Monograph, "U.S. Army in
Indo-China 1942-1945"

James L. Collins, Jr.
JAMES L. COLLINS, JR.
Brigadier General, USA
Chief of Military History

*Army and State Dept reviews
completed*

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THE UNITED STATES ARMY IN INDO-CHINA 1942-1945

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CHAPTER I

"...DO NOTHING IN REGARD TO INDO-CHINA"

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a From Pearl Harbor until V-J Day Indo-China was of comparatively little political or military interest to the United States. During 1942 American military leaders were far too busy with urgent matters in the Pacific and North Africa to give much thought to what was, in effect, a minor part of a minor theatre (CBI.) Military and political intelligence emanating from Indo-China during this period was likewise meagre and unencouraging. *

* M.I.D. files contain only one item on Indo-China for 1942. Professor Kenneth P. Landon recalls that [redacted] in 1943 the files on Indo-China contained four articles from Asia Magazine. Interview with Kenneth P. Landon, January 29, 1972.

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Although still under the French flag, with a Vichy French government and administration, the area, for all practical purposes, had been under Japanese control since the summer of 1941. In the weeks after Pearl Harbor the Japanese had used Indo-China as a staging area and base for their attacks on allied positions in China and Southeast Asia; a fact which the Americans were to remember in their future dealings with the French.

Official American policy regarding Indo-China appeared to favor continued recognition of French sovereignty in the area. In April 1942 Acting Secretary of State Sumner Welles stated that the United States "recognizes the sovereign jurisdiction of the people of France...over French possessions overseas." * Somewhat more effusively Ambassador

*

Department of State Bulletin, April 18, 1942.

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Robert Murphy assured General Henri Giraud that "the restoration of France, in all her grandeur, and in all the areas which she possessed before the war in Europe as well as overseas, is one of the war aims of the United Nations... French sovereignty should be re-established as soon as possible over all territories, Metropolitan as well as colonial..."*

* William L. Langer Our Vichy Gamble (New York: Harper, 1966) p. 33.

Unfortunately American policy was not nearly so clear-cut and unequivocal as these statements suggest. President Franklin Roosevelt possessed strong, if somewhat vague, views about the future of Indo-China. The President firmly believed that Indo-China should not be returned to France at the end of the war but should be given a trusteeship status, with China or perhaps Britain as the trustee. Roosevelt frequently observed that "after 100 years of French rule the inhabitants (of Indo-China) were worse off than they had been before."*

* "U.S. Vietnam Relations 1945-1967, (Washington; GPO 1971), vol. 7, p. 25, p. 30. Elliot Roosevelt, As He Saw It (New York: Duell Sloan and Pearce, 1946), p. 115.

In conversations with his advisors and with foreign diplomats and at wartime conferences Roosevelt made it clear that he was opposed to the return of Indo-China to France. "I saw Halifax (the British Ambassador to the United States) last week and told him that it was perfectly true that I had for over a year expressed the opinion that

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Indo-China should not go back to France." wrote Roosevelt to Hull in January, 1944, "...it should be administered by an international trusteeship. France has had the country one hundred years, and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning."*

*

"Memorandum by President Roosevelt to Secretary of State"

January 24, 1944, Foreign Relations of the United States 1944.

Roosevelt similarly turned thumbs down on any plans to use French troops in the liberation of Indo-China. With the concurrence of the Joint Chiefs of Staff he refused to authorize the allocation of shipping to the French to transport an expeditionary corps to Southeast Asia.* The President also refused to consider even low-level intelligence

*

Joseph Drachman United States Policy Toward Vietnam (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson Press: 1970), p. 71.

and commando type operations in Indo-China if they involved French participation. In October, 1944, Roosevelt told Secretary of State Hull that "we should do nothing in regard to resistance groups, or in any other way in relation to Indo-China"*

*

"Memorandum by President Roosevelt to the Secretary of State"

October 16, 1944 Foreign Relations 1944.

A good deal, however, had already been done. Allied commanders in the Far East were anxious to obtain military intelligence relating to Indo-China and for this purpose some measure of co-operation with the French was deemed necessary. It was also widely believed that

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both the Vietnamese and the French in Indo-China were restive under their Japanese masters and that their services might be enlisted for various types of espionage and fifth column activities. American commanders in China and India did not deliberately set out to contravene or circumvent American policy in Indo-China. That policy was sufficiently vague and ambiguous to allow for a wide variety of interpretations and local commanders were not normally kept informed of its latest twists and modifications. The need for tactical intelligence was sometimes urgent; the instructions from Washington were few and uncertain. Nevertheless there can be no doubt that from 1943 onward Americans in the Far East continuously violated the letter, if not the spirit, of FDR's dictum that we should "do nothing in regard to Indo-China"

Among the first to take an active interest in Vietnam was Navy Commodore Milton E. "Mary" Miles. As commander of Navy Group China, Miles presided over a kaleidoscopic organization with responsibility for liaison, training, espionage, guerrilla warfare and support of naval operations.*

* For a discussion of the activities of Navy Group China see Milton E. Miles, A Different Kind of War (New York: MacMillan, 1966), and Oscar P. Fitzgerald "Naval Group China: A study of Guerrilla Warfare During World War II," Georgetown M.A. thesis 1968.

He also served as Deputy Director of a joint Chinese American espionage group known as the Sino-American Co-operation Organization led by the

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Chinese master-spy General Tai Li. Early in 1943 Miles conceived a plan to set up an agent net in Indo-China by utilizing "a French group which had no ties either with Vichy or De Gaulle," Miles believed the Gaulists would be "persona non grata" to both the Chinese in south China and the Vietnamese in northern Indo-China where he proposed to operate.

The man Miles chose to head his operation was a French naval officer, Commander Robert Meynier, a supporter of General Henri Giraud, the American-sponsored Governor of French North Africa. Like Giraud, Meynier was a war hero, was anti-German, anti-British and strongly pro-American. More important he was married to a woman with important connections among the Vietnamese mandarin class. The other Frenchmen in Meynier's espionage group had extensive contacts among the French officers in Vietnam.

Almost from the start the Meynier Group found its operation hampered and circumscribed by the French Military Mission in Chungking which was Gaulist in its loyalties. Ironically the Vichyite French in Indo-China were also suspicious of the Meynier Group because of its association with the Gaulists in Chungking.

Despite these handicaps Meynier was not wholly unsuccessful. Before his recall to France in 1944 he succeeded in establishing a network of agents inside Indo-China. Many of these agents operated from inside French government agencies or even inside the French intelligence office, "the Deuxieme Bureau." They sent back a steady stream of information on field fortifications, troop movements, and

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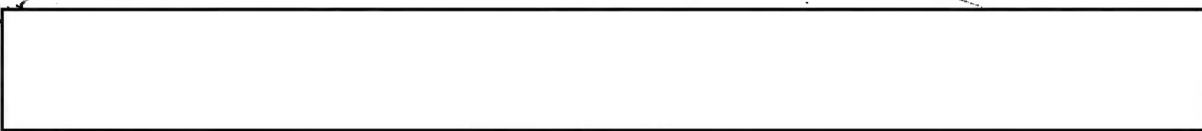
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shipping routes. Other agents, operating as coast watchers, reported to the 14th Air Force on the movement of Japanese ships and convoys.* More significantly Meynier's agents provided Naval

*
(C) Miles "Report on the activities of SACO Directed toward Indo-China;" pp. 1-22 and passim, Milton E. Miles Papers, Office of Naval History.

Group China and the O.S.S.* with the first accurate, up-to-date poli-

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tical information on Indo-China ^{that} American officials had had since Pearl Harbor. These agents stressed the fact that the Vietnamese would not be willing to continue as a French colony after the defeat of Japan. A member of Meynier's group who visited Langson in mid-February, 1944, reported that it was "foolish optimism to believe that, at the end of the war, the Annamites are prepared to continue to join their fate to the French colonial government.... Revolutionaries, national or communist, are very active in Cochin-China.... The Annamites place a great deal of hope and faith in the United States."* Even so conservative

*
(U) Miles, "Report on Activities" p. 27.

an observer as Mme. Meynier, whose contacts were among the higher ranks of the mandarin and business class, stated flatly in a report to Miles that "the evident goal of all Nationalist Cochin-Chinese is to pre-

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pare the independence of their country. The various parties differ only in the procedure to be followed..."*

* Mme. Meynier to Miles n.d. Miles Papers.

Thus as early as 1943 the essential facts about the political situation in Vietnam were available to American commanders. These facts, namely: that the Vietnamese were determined to have independence, that they would fight for it, and that they looked to the United States for support, were never clearly understood at the various command levels in the Far East, nor, for that matter, in Washington, until well after V-J Day. It is not known whether Miles attempted to communicate the political information he had acquired to his superiors. In any case, American generals and diplomats in the years ahead were to learn rather more painfully, and at considerable cost, the same facts that Miles had learned from Mme. Meynier in 1943.

Far more important to Allied espionage in Indo-China than Navy Group China was a mysterious network known as "the GBT group." This was a complicated organization which carried out its operations with the co-operation of the British and American military attaches in Chungking and the Chinese G-2.* The Group was older than, and inde-

5 * (C) General Wedemeyers Data Book, Section 20, Office Chief of Military History, Washington, D.C.

pendent of Naval Group China, although both had ties to the O.S.S. The operating head of the GBT group was Lawrence L. Gordon, a Canadian

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citizen who had worked for many years in Vietnam as an employee of the Texas Oil Company. After Pearl Harbor his services had been obtained for U.S. Army intelligence.

The main function of the GBT Group, which maintained an agent net throughout Vietnam, was the rescue of Allied pilots shot down over Indo-China. On occasion they were even able to engineer the escape of British and American flyers from prisoner-of-war camps. The Group also furnished valuable target information to the 14th Air Force.

Unlike other Allied intelligence organizations in southern China, the GBT Group established relations not only with the French in Indo-China but also with the revolutionary nationalist group of Vietnamese known as the Vietminh. The Vietminh, or Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Ho^a, was an association of nationalist organizations dominated by the Indo-Chinese Communist party. It had been organized in the spring of 1941 by a group of Vietnamese exiles in south China led by Ho Chi Minh, a veteran revolutionary.

The Chinese, who had their own plans for Vietnam, arrested Ho in August, 1942, and established their own Vietnamese independence movement, the Dong Minh Hoi. But the Dong Minh Hoi lacked able leadership and faced stiff opposition from the Vietminh. In September, 1943, Chang Fa Kwei, the Chinese warlord General who commanded the Fourth War Area, decided to try a new tack. He had Ho released from prison and made him head of the Dong Minh Hoi with a subsidy of 100,000 Chinese dollars a month. The Vietminh ostensibly became a part of the Dong Minh Hoi but, in fact, soon controlled it. Utilizing the Chinese subsidy, and with the co-operation of the mountain tribesmen,

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the Vietminh established an impressive underground network throughout northern Tonkin.

American diplomats and consular official in South China were dimly aware of the activities of the Vietnamese nationalists but generally discounted them as of no significance.* In January, 1944, in a report

* (U) e.g. Acheson (chargé d' Affaires Chungking) to Secretary of State, 31 May 1943, 31 July 1943, Record Group (hereafter "R.G.") 59 National Archives.

which circulated throughout the Far East Division of the State Department, Ambassador Clarence E. Gauss expressed the opinion that the "Chinese-sponsored Annamite activities are of little importance." William R. Langdon, American consul general at Kunming, after a conversation with Vietminh leaders, observed that "these groups are of no real importance in the Indo-China question."*

* (U) Report of [] 7 September 1944, enclosure to C.E. Gauss to Secretary of State, 9 September 1944, R.G. 59, National Archives.

American military leaders in China took the Vietminh more seriously. By the fall of 1944 American money and supplies were being channeled to the Vietminh through the GBT group.* In November, 1944, Marine

* Robert Shaplen reports that Ho Chi Minh and his associates made a total of four visits to Kunming during 1944 in the course of which he talked with representatives of the O.S.S. and with Major

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General Claire L. Chenault^u commander of the 14th Air Force; Shaplen, The Lost Revolution, (New York: Harper, 1966), pp. 33-34. [General Albert C. Wedemeyer in conversation with this author recalls that the Vietminh sometime in late 1944.]

Lieutenant Charles Fenn, the O.S.S. liaison officer with GBT Group, reported approvingly that "... the only Annamites who do anything but talk are the Communists...they appear to have the usual Communist energy as apposed to the natural Annamite indolence."*

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* (U) Report by Lt. Charles Fenn USMCR, enclosure to Lt. Col. J. B. de Sibour to John P. Davies, 23 November 1944. F.I.C. Book 1, Wedemeyer Files, R.G. 407.

The American military contacts with the Vietminh and the French underground, such as they were, aroused the wrath of the new Ambassador to China General Patrick J. Hurley. Like Roosevelt, a strong anti-colonialist, Hurley was suspicious of all British and French clandestine activities in Southeast Asia. "I indicated to Hurley that I had given you permission to issue some equipment to certain forces in Indo-China as requested by Colonel Gordon," wrote General Albert C. Wedemeyer to the commander of the 14th Air Force, "He was not pleased by my action although I mentioned the intelligence contribution which you desire very much and which caused me to approve the request... However, General Hurley has had increasing evidence that the British French and Dutch are working...for the attainment of imperialistic policies and he felt we should do nothing to assist them in their endeavors which run

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counter to U.S. policy."*

* (C) Wedemeyer to General Claire E. Chenault, December 27, 1945, Wedemeyer Files, R.G. 407.

Hurley's position appears to have faithfully reflected President Roosevelt's own views. When the British government protested in December 1944 that "it would be difficult to deny French participation in the liberation of Indo-China," Roosevelt instructed Secretary of State Stettinius that "I still do not want to get mixed up in any Indo-China decision. It is a matter for post-war....I do not want to get mixed up in any military effort toward the liberation of Indo-China."* There is nevertheless strong evidence that the 14th

* Roosevelt to Stettinius, Jan 1, 1945 Foreign Relations 1945 p. 293.

Air Force and other American units in China continued to co-operate to a limited extent with both the French and the Vietminh inside Indo-China in order to obtain needed intelligence and to aid in rescue of downed pilots.* When General Wedemeyer assumed command of China Theatre

* In late January 1945 a group described as "the Free French underground" provided the Navy and the Fourteenth Air Force with "pinpoint targets in the Saigon area." Records of G-2 14th AF Indo-China File. Records of 14th AF.

he found the relations between the Free French in Kunming and the 14th Air Force to be "very co-operative and friendly" and believed that

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of General Stilwell.*

* Interview with Wedemeyer.

By February, 1945, the President himself had changed his stand somewhat. At Yalta he told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that "he favored anything that was against the Japanese in Indo-China so long as the United States was not aligned with the French."* This appeared to

* Charles Romanus & Riley Sunderland, Time Runs Out in CBI, - (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1969) p. 20.

open the way for American intelligence operations in Indo-China but just at this juncture an event occurred which was to fundamentally alter both the political situation in Indo-China and American involvement there.

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CHAPTER II

"....ALLRIGHT TO HELP"

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At eight o'clock on the evening of March 9, 1945, the Japanese ambassador to French Indo-China presented Admiral Jean Decoux, the Governor General, with an ultimatum demanding that direct control of the government police and armed forces of the colony be turned over to the Japanese.

Two hours later Japanese forces moved against French forts and garrisons all over Indo-China. Most were quickly disarmed, but a few offered fierce, although brief, resistance and a sizeable body of men stationed in the north managed to make their way into the mountainous jungle areas of Western Tonkin and Laos where they attempted to conduct a guerrilla-type resistance.

The Japanese coup of March, 1945, marked an important turning point in the history of Indo-China. It signaled the end of the painful French pretense to sovereignty in Indo-China and provided new opportunities to the Vietminh and other nationalists to expand their activities and add to their following. At the same time it created untold difficulties for the Free French government of General Charles De Gaulle, newly installed in Paris, which was at pains to obtain recognition from the Allies of its claim to continued sovereignty in Indo-China.

Devastating as it was, the Japanese coup of March 9th did not come as a complete surprise to American officials concerned with East Asia. As early as September, 1944, a State Department expert on Southeast Asia had advised the President in a draft memo that "It is

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thought the Japanese may shortly disarm the French and take over the country."* William Powell, the OWI Air Liaison Representative in

* Chief, Southwest Pacific Division, draft memo for the President, 8 September 44, National Archives R.G. 59.

Chungking, reported that "all of us out here anticipate quite an upheaval in Indo-China."*

* (U) Powell to Clarence Gauss 6 September 1944, enclosures to Gauss to Secretary of State, 9 September 1945, R.G. 59.

As the outlook for Indo-China became more anxious, French officials in Kunming "made strenuous efforts to determine the possible lines of action the United States might take."* On February 2, 1945, General

* (U) China Theatre History Vol. 1. Chapter 5 p. 24.

Albert C. Wedemeyer, commander of the United States Forces in China Theatre, was approached by the French military attaché in Chungking who expressed anxiety over the possibility of a Japanese military take-over in Indo-China. Should this occur, the attaché believed that the French forces would retreat to the mountains, there to carry on guerrilla warfare against the Japanese. The attaché asked whether, under these circumstances, the United States would be prepared to give assistance to such troops.

Wedemeyer was non-committal, merely indicating to the French representative that the matter was one for higher level decision. The

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American General was aware that the question of American co-operation with the French in Indo-China was a very delicate one and that the President himself held strong views on the subject. He cabled Washington for guidance; but the State and War Departments could "only reiterate the President's policy" of non-involvement in Indo-China matters.

✓ Nevertheless the President's position had already begun to change somewhat. At Yalta he told the Joint Chiefs that he was "in favor of anything that is against the Japanese in Indo-China provided that we do not align ourselves with the French."* Accordingly Brigadier

* Memo by Gen Gross, 20 February 1945, Wedemeyer F.I.C. Book II; Foreign Relations Vol. VI. 1945, p: 297.

General Melvin E. Gross, the Acting Chief of Staff, China Theatre, was able to instruct his commanders on February 20 that "appropriate and feasible help," such as the delivery of medical supplies, might be rendered to Free French guerrillas who made their way to the Chinese border. The matter of their entry into China, however, "should be settled directly between the Chinese and the French."* On March 7,

* (U) China Theatre History Vol. 1 Chapter 5 p. 30.

China Theatre headquarters further cautioned commanders that "any help or aid given to the French by us shall be in such a way that it cannot possibly be construed as furthering the political aims of the FrenchThe governing factor is that the action be in futherance

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of our military objectives and not a matter of convenience to the French or to any other nation."* Two days later the Japanese struck.

* (U) Chenault to Gross 9 March 1945, Wedemeyer Files.

The first news of the Japanese coup received by Americans in the China Theatre was a radio message from the French garrison at Langson transmitted about midnight on the 9th of March. The message reported a heavy Japanese attack on the garrison and speculated that an "overall attack" on all French units in Indo-China was probably underway. The defenders requested American air strikes on certain designated targets in their sea. General Wedemeyer was at this time on a visit to Washington in order to present his plan for a drive to the China Coast to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.* In his absence Major General Robert

* Romanus & Sunderland op. cit., pp. 335-338.

McClure had assumed the duties of CG, China Theatre.

Immediately after receiving the French radio, Major General Claire L. Chenault, commanding the 14th Air Force, requested permission to provide the air assistance which the French had asked for and "to co-operate directly with the French authorities in Kunming" to conduct attacks in Indo-China generally. A few hours later Theatre Headquarters replied to Chenault. "This is about your CAK 7219. Go ahead. Co-operate completely with the French. You can use Poseh airfield. Give them hell."* In a later message Theatre Headquarters added that

* Gross to Chenault, DFB 3404110, March 1945. Wedemeyer Files.

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its authorization to co-operate with the French "pertains entirely to the present emergency."

At the same time that China Theatre was giving the green light to the 14th Air Force, General Wedemeyer was receiving a very different type of directive in Washington. In a private conference with President Roosevelt, Wedemeyer learned that the chief executive was "determined that there would be no military assistance to the French in Indo-China."* The General later recalled that Roosevelt hoped "to

* Interview with General Albert C. Wedemeyer 2 February 1945.

discontinue colonization (colonialism) in Southeast Asia area."*

* Ibid.

Wedemeyer later expressed "surprise" when he saw the contents of General Gross's telegram and observed that had he been present at Chungking in person he would not have granted such sweeping authority to his commanders to aid the French.* Wedemeyer, however, was not in

* Ibid.

China and Gross's telegram had set in motion a chain of events which was to result in the continued active involvement of the United States forces in Indo-China from that day until the Japanese surrender.

While his planes were preparing to aid the French, General Chenault also succeeded in persuading Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek to allow French military units fleeing the Japanese to enter China. The Chinese authorities further agreed that "if stiff resistance is put up by the

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French against the Japanese, military assistance may be rendered."*

*

"Minutes of Meeting of National Military Council" 10 March 1945; Gen. Hsu Yung to Gen. Gross, 16 March 1945, Wedemeyer Files.

As the fighting in Indo-China became more desperate, French requests for assistance increased. The French underground network in Vietnam, which had provided 14 Air Force with intelligence and rescued downed pilots, was being rapidly wiped out. On March 11, a group of about 1,000 Vietnamese colonial troops with 20 French officers was attempting to slowly fight its way out of Vietnam to the Chinese border. The group was commanded by a Colonel LeCog who in the past had operated an underground radio station which had provided "valuable information" to the 14th Air Force.* Colonel LeCog now requested

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direct American air support for his troops.

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* (U) Chenault to Marshall for Hull March 1945, F.I.C. Book.

Up to this time 14th Air Force had restricted itself to general bombing of a number of specific Japanese military target in I-C.

At about the same time that Chenault and Gross's message arrived in Washington, the French Ambassador, M. Henri Bonnet, called upon the Secretary of State to request "all possible support" from the U.S. to the French resistance fighters in Indo-China. The French request spoke of "immediate tactical and material assistance in every field: direct support of operations and the parachuting of arms, medical supplies, quinine and food."* Bonnet was apparently not

* Foreign Relations 1945, Vol VI pp. 290-299.

aware that Chenault's planes were already flying missions in support of the French.

The following evening General De Gaulle, in a conversation with the American Ambassador, expressed concern over reports that the Americans and British had failed to come to the aid of the French in Vietnam. Ambassador Caffery passed along De Gaulle's complaints to Washington.*

* Caffery to SECSTATE 13 Marcy 1945 Foreign Relations 1945 Vol VI. p. 300.

All of these requests and pleas were before Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius on March 16 when, in a memorandum for the President, he discussed the question of American aid for Indo-China.

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Settinus believed that the French were attempting to make the United States "appear responsible for the weakness of their resistance to the Japanese." He suggested that "we combat this trend by making public our desire to render such assistance as may be warranted by the circumstances..." The Secretary of State hoped that Roosevelt would agree to a public statement by the American government on its actions to aid the French.*

*

Settinus, Memo for the Pres. 16 March 1945," U.S. Vietnam Relations Vol. 7, pp. 66.

The President did not agree to the proposal for a public statement, but he did give his consent to continued aid to the resistance fighters. Consequently, on the evening of March 18, Major General Thomas C. Handy, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army, phoned General Wedemeyer's home with a message from Admiral Leahy about Indo-China. According to Brigadier General Paul Carraway who took the call, "Leahy said it was allright to help the Frogs, providing such help does not interfere with our operations."*

*

(U) Carraway to Wedemeyer 19 March 1945, Wedemeyer Files.

Carraway tried unsuccessfully to get in touch with General Wedemeyer who was visiting friends in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. After trying most of the night to reach the general, Carraway himself drafted and sent a message "Urgent," "Priority," to General Chenault. "The U.S. Government present attitude is to aid the French providing

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such assistance does not interfere with operations now planned...operations against the Japanese to aid the French may be under-taken by the Fourteenth Air Force."*

* Memo for General Wedemeyer 20 March 1945, Wedemeyer Files.

Although the United States was now definitely committed to aiding the Indo-China Resistance, the French government continued to express dissatisfaction about the extent and type of American support. On March 24th General De Gaulle told the American Ambassador in Paris that no supplies had been dropped to the resistance fighters in Indo-China and added that he could only assume that "this government, as a matter of policy, does not want to help the French."* De Gaulle's

* Caffery to SECSTATE 24 March 1945 Foreign Relations 1945 Vol. VI p. 302.

complaints were in part justified. A report from General Chenault revealed that between March 12 and March 28 the 14th Air Force had flown a total of 34 missions into Indo-China comprising 98 aircraft sorties of which 43 were bombing, 24 offensive reconnaissance, and 31 regular reconnaissance. Twenty-eight of these sorties were "in response to direct request by the French." Chenault cited "bad weather, non-availability of surplus equipment, and the fluidity of the situation" to explain the paucity of American air support.*

* Chenault to War Dept. 14 April 1945, Wedemeyer Files.

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The Air Force Commander's report did not speak of supplies and indeed the extreme scarcity of all types of equipment in the China Theatre, which was forced to rely for its supplies on the long and hazardous flights over the "hump" of the Himalaya Mountains, precluded the allocation of any of these scarce items to the French. Prior to April only small amounts of blankets and medical supplies had been dropped to them.* By the beginning of April, however, the State

*

Ibid.

Department was becoming increasingly concerned over French complaints and H. Freeman Mathews, head of the Department's European division informally suggested to the War Department that "even a token drop of supplies would assist in refuting the allegations and accusations" that the United States had no desire to give assistance to the French Resistance fighters. Accordingly, the War Department instructed the Commanding General, China Theatre, that requests for supplies by the Resistance might be honored "providing they represent only a negligible diversion from Theatre's planned operations and entail no additional commitments."*

*

Hull to Wedemeyer 7 April 1945 Wedemeyer Files.

General Wedemeyer, who was hard put to supply his own forces, was still in no position to supply the scarce items, such as gasoline, requested by the French. Although a limited number of items were dropped to the French during April, General Wedemeyer was still obliged as late as

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21 April to turn down requests for additional supplies other than medicine.* The French, unaware of the War Department's instructions

* Wedemeyer to Sabattier, 21 April 1945, Wedemeyer Files.

to General Wedemeyer, were quick to attribute the lack of supplies to the deliberate policies of the American government.

From the foregoing it is clear that the view that the United States deliberately limited and delayed its help to the French during the Japanese takeover, a view accepted by most historians of Indo-China, is in fact far from the truth. The Japanese coup instead marked the beginning of a more active and direct United States role in the affairs of Indo-China.

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CHAPTER III

"....AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY FOR O.S.S...."

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One important effect of the Japanese takeover in March, 1945 was, as we have seen, to disrupt the normal intelligence channels available to China Theatre. Individuals who had served as long-established sources of information suddenly disappeared or were arrested. The whole intelligence network which had been carefully built upon sources within the French administration and the military was now, of course, quite inoperable.

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peoples.*

* (U) Grew to Director OSS. 19 July 1945 R.G. 59.

In a few weeks the United States had thus moved from a non-committal policy of aloofness to one of active co-operation with both the French and the Vietnamese nationalists. This shift was made under the broad formula of "any foe of the Japanese is a friend of ours," yet the basic outlines of American policy towards Indo-China particularly towards the post-war fate of the colony remained to be decided. Until this was accomplished, the Army and Air Force commanders on the scene would still be subject to contradictory instructions and sudden changes in direction.

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CHAPTER IV

TOWARD AN INDO-CHINA POLICY

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The Japanese coup which had precipitated the shift in American military policy towards Indo-China had also prompted a re-examination in Washington of basic American policy towards the area. There was a general feeling in State and War Department circles that this was no longer a matter which could be left "for postwar" but that certain basic decisions would have to be made well before the Axis surrender. On March 13, 1945, the State, War and Navy Co-ordinating Committee discussed the situation in Indo-China and concluded that "failing to take action in this area with U.S. forces may lead to a situation where inaction by the United States has the practical effect of indicating lack of American interest in this area and giving greater influence to the British and the French...."* The SWNCC

*

(C) "Minutes of Meeting of the State-War & Navy Co-ordinating Committee, 13 March 1945," SWNCC 32/1/0 R.G. 165. National Archives.

recommended that the Secretary of State should endeavor to obtain a "clarification" of U.S. policy towards Indo-China from the President.*

*

Ibid.

Before any action could be taken, however, President Roosevelt was dead and his vice-president, Harry S. Truman, had assumed the presidency.

On April 13, 1945, one day after Roosevelt's death, Under Secretary of the Army Robert A. Lovett told the State, War and Navy Committee that it was "essential" that F.D.R.'s prohibition on the formulation of a definite Indo-China policy until "post-war" be reconsidered.

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Lovett pointed out that the lack of a definite policy was "a source of serious embarrassment to the military." Admiral Fenard, the head of the French military mission, had taken advantage of the lack of a definite American policy to submit questions to various agencies of the U.S. government and "by obtaining negative or even non-committal answers has been in effect writing American policy in Indo-China."*

* (C) "Minutes of the Meeting of State, War and Navy Co-ordinating Committee, 13 April 1945." Records of State, War and Navy Co-ordinating Committee R.G. 165 National Archives.

The State Department representative on the State, War and Navy Co-ordinating Committee observed that the department's Sub-Committee on the Far East "had been so far unable to agree upon a firm Indo-China policy "due to a divergence of views."*

* Ibid.

The "divergence of views" referred to was basically a split between those few members of the department who, often for reasons different from those of the President, supported the Roosevelt policy of opposition to colonialism and a U.N. trusteeship for Indo-China and the majority of the foreign policy establishment who opposed Roosevelt's scheme as probably unworkable and definitely dangerous to U.S. relations with France. The principal opponents of a French return to Indo-China were William R. Langdon, the American consul at Kunming; Kenneth P. Landon, the desk officer for Southeast Asia in the

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State Department's South West Pacific Division; and Abbott Low Moffatt, chief of the division.

As early as September, 1944, in a memorandum which circulated throughout the department, Langdon had reported that "the Annamites are generally dissatisfied with French rule" and had recommended that the United States "should capitalize on our (military) position to obtain for the Annamites some substantial political rights such as local and colonial assemblies, customs autonomy and a civil service."

Langdon was even more concerned to end what he referred to as "the greedy exclusionist commercial policy of the French in Indo-China."*

* William R. Langdon to SEC State, 19 September 1944, September 20, 1944. R. G. 59 National Archives.

He called for the conversion of Haiphong to a free port and unrestricted transit facilities between Haiphong and China. Landon on the other hand was uninterested in the economic aspects, but had early decided that colonialism in Southeast Asia was finished. While Langdon called for "political rights" for the Vietnamese, Landon favored complete self-government, perhaps under a U.N. trusteeship.*

* Interview with Kenneth P. Landon, 29 Nov 1971, 19 January 1972.

Abbott Low Moffatt incorporated these views in a draft memorandum on April 28, 1945, which noted that the United States should remind the French government of three facts: first, that "the collaboration of French Indo-China with the enemy has intensified our military

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problems;" second, that "the United States commercial relations in Southeast Asia will be of increasing importance to its peacetime economy;" and third, that "the trend toward self-rule in this area will be inexorable" after the end of the war. Moffatt's memo called for a trusteeship, and end of economic discrimination in favor of France, and the return of the Kwangcho leasehold to China, as well as "an equitable settlement of the Indo-China Thailand border along ethnic lines."*

* Moffatt "Draft Memo for the French Government" 20 April 1945
R.G. 59.

These were the views of what might be called the State Department's "anti-colonialists." Against them were ranged the vast majority of State Department policy makers, including all of the senior officials. These men thought primarily in terms of American relations with Europe and were anxious to avoid any undertaking that would tend to exacerbate the United States' already strained relations with France. "There was no sympathy (among high level officials) in State at all for Roosevelt's Indo-China policy," Kenneth P. Landon later recalled.* Consequently,

* Landon interview, 29 November 1971.

the final State Department memorandum was a very different document from that drafted by Landon. It pointed out that the U.S. was already publicly committed to the recognition of French sovereignty over all her former possessions and urged the abandonment of any further attempt to prevent, or set conditions upon, the return of Indo-China to France.

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Further efforts in this direction would only serve to alienate the British and French and would "run counter to our policy of aiding France to regain her position in the world."

With the concurrence of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the State Department recommended that "the United States should not oppose the restoration of Indo-China to France nor take any action which it is not prepared to take toward any other Allied possession," and should not object to any assistance which the British, operating from South East Asia Command, proposed to give to the French in Indo-China.*

* Dept. of State "Draft Memorandum for the President," 28 April 1945; JLS 1200/14, R.G. 165.

Nor should the United States continue to oppose French proposals for participating in the war against Japan. Such proposals should be considered solely "on their military merits."*

* Ibid.

There is no evidence that the State Department's memorandum ever became, per se, the Indo-China policy of the United States. Over the next few weeks, however, the actions and attitudes of Washington were to closely parallel those of the memorandum. The result was to be, at least at the Washington level, an abandonment of any attempt to prevent the French return to Southeast Asia. At the San Francisco Conference, which convened on April 26, 1945, to discuss the post-war structure of the United Nations, the United States failed to press

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for a U.N. trusteeship for Indo-China. Two weeks later, on May 8, Secretary of State Stettinus told Georges Bidault, the French Foreign Minister, that "the record is entirely innocent of any official statement of the U.S. government questioning, even by implication, French sovereignty over Indo-China."*

*

Foreign Relations 1945, Volume V, pp. 557-568.

At the same time, the State, War, and Navy Co-ordinating committee had finally agreed upon an approach to Indo-China. This was incorporated into a long report on "Politico-Military Problems in the Far East and Initial Post Defeat Policy Relating to Japan," which the Secretary of State sent to President Truman for approval on June 2, 1945. While conceding that "independence sentiment in the area is believed to be increasingly strong," the report declared that "the United States recognizes French sovereignty over Indo-China."*

*

Foreign Relations 1945, Volume VI, p. 307.

The period from April to June, 1945, thus witnessed a sharp reversal of President Roosevelt's Indo-China policy. The death of the President was, of course, an important factor in this turn of events. More important, however, was the vagueness of the policy itself. As Chester Cooper observed, "It was not that Truman or the Secretary of State consciously decided against pursuing Roosevelt's trusteeship plan - either as a unilateral American policy or through the new United Nations. The problem was that, at the time, there was nothing very much to go on. Roosevelt himself probably had not reached

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a firm decision on Indochina's future."* Many American policy-makers

* Chester Cooper The Lost Crusade (New York 1970) p. 38.

even insisted that there had been "no real change" in U.S. Indo-China policy. In retrospect, however, it is clear that Roosevelt's death marked the end of any American opposition to a French return to Indochina.

None of this was apparent to American leaders in the Far East who were not privy to the high-level deliberations in Washington. During the weeks when U.S. Indo-China policy was being carefully reassessed, General Wedemeyer was engaged in a bitter dispute with Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, commander-in-chief of Southeast Asia Command over command boundaries in Southeast Asia. Since 1944 SEAC had conducted air operations and intelligence missions into Indo-China over the protests of General Wedemeyer, who claimed that Indo-China was properly a part of China Theatre Command and that any British operations there ought to be co-ordinated with, and approved by, him. Late in March, General Wedemeyer visited SEAC headquarters at Kandy, Ceylon, to discuss the question of Indo-China operations with Lord Mountbatten. He departed believing firmly that Mountbatten had agreed not to conduct further operations in Indo-China unless they were approved by China Theatre.*

* "Memorandum by the Assistant to the President's Naval Aide" n.d. July 1945," Foreign Relations 1945: The Conference of Berlin Vol. 1. p. 918.

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Lord Louis and the British believed, however, that they were only committed to informing Wedemeyer about their operations in Indo-China.*

* Ibid.

When Mountbatten informed China Theatre in May that he proposed to fly 26 sorties into Indo-China in support of the French, Wedemeyer was furious. "It had never occurred to me" he wired to Lord Louis "that you would presume that you have authority to operate in an area contiguous to your own without cognizance and full authority of the commander of that area... Your decision...is a direct violation of the intent of our respective directives."*

* (U) Wedemeyer to Mountbatten, 25 May 1945, F.I.C. Book I.

Wedemeyer's concern was not simply over the question of command boundaries. In Washington he and Ambassador Hurley had been cautioned by President Roosevelt to "watch carefully to prevent any British and French political activities in Indo-China."* Control of clandestine

* Wedemeyer to Marshall, 28 May 1945. Wedemeyer's F.I.C. Book 2

activities in Indochina would enable the British to influence political developments and alignments in that country. General Wedemeyer also feared that the French guerrillas might not employ their arms against the Japanese but against their political rivals.*

* "Memo by the Assistant to the President's Naval Aide" p. 919.

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Wedemeyer summed up his complaints in an "eyes only" letter to General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the Army. Wedemeyer believed that the British refusal to recognize Indo-China as being in the China Theatre, the increased activities of the British in Indochina and the large French military staff at Southeast Asia Command Headquarters all pointed to the existence of "a British and French plan to re-establish their pre-war political and economic positions in Southeast Asia."* Ambassador Hurley supported the general with an even stronger

* (U) Wedemeyer to Marshall, 28 May 1945, F.I.C. Book 2.

letter to President Truman. The ambassador called attention to the British actions in Indo-China and asserted that Lord Mountbatten "is using American lend-lease supplies and other American resources to invade Indo-China to defeat what we believe to be American policy, and to reestablish French imperialism"*

* Hurley to Harry S. Truman, 28 May 1945 Foreign Relations 1945: The Conference of Berlin p. 920.

Washington's reply undoubtedly came as a surprise to Hurley and Wedemeyer. Although the Department of State declared that "there has been no basic change in [United States] policy," it was pointed out that decisions reached at the conferences at Yalta and San Francisco "would preclude the establishment of a trusteeship in Indo-China except under the French government. The latter seems unlikely."* The

* (U) Sec State to Hurley, 7 June 1945 R.G. 165 National Archives.

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Ambassador was informed that the United States now "welcomes French participation in the Pacific war to the extent practical," and that French offers of assistance should "be considered on their military merits." United States forces in China were free to co-operate with French resistance groups in Indo-China "provided such assistance does not interfere with requirements of other planned operations."*

* Ibid.

General Wedemeyer received a similar telegram from the Chief of Staff, who advised him that "the State Department's [new] position eliminates the political necessity of curtailing Lord Mountbatten's operations in Indo-China." These operations should henceforth "be judged strictly on their military merits and in relation to the stand of the Generalissimo."*

* (C) Marshall to Wedemeyer, 4 June 1945, Wedemeyer's F.I.C. Book 2.

So ended the last American attempts, at the command level, to restrict French and British activities in Indo-China. All participants agree, however that the change in American policy, such as it was, never became generally known in China Theatre. General Wedemeyer, for his part, did not consider the Marshall message a sign of a fundamental change in American policy but merely another concession to French pressure for a role in the Pacific war. In his actions towards Indo-China he considered himself to be still bound by President Roosevelt's

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oral
verbal instructions to him in March. The subtle distinctions and modifications of the State, War and Navy Co-ordinating and the State Department were little known or understood by the men who were to carry the main burden of responsibility for the Army's operations in Indo-China as the war drew to a close.

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CHAPTER V

"AMERICANS.....NOT TO BE INVOLVED IN THE INTERNAL POLITICAL STRUGGLE"

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In accordance with decisions reached by the Allies at Potsdam, the occupation of Indo-China north of the 16th Parallel was to be the responsibility of the Chinese. South of the 16th Parallel it would be the responsibility of the British. Although American military personnel were to be involved in both occupations, their responsibility for providing advice and logistic support to the Chinese Armies naturally made their role in the occupation of northern Indo-China much more important.

At Chungking General Wedemeyer's Theatre Planning Section began work in early August on a joint American-Chinese plan for the occupation of northern Vietnam.* By 7 September a final plan had been

* (C) CSM 113, 23 August 1945, China Theatre File, R.G. 407.

completed and approved by Chiang and General Wedemeyer. The plan was based upon the assumption that no United States ground forces would be committed to the area but that American "liaison and advisory personnel would accompany the occupation troops to assist the Chinese commanders."* The planners believed that the number of occupation

* (U) China Theatre History Chapter 5, p. 28. Office, Chief of Military History.

forces "should be held to an absolute minimum." Northern Tonkin was suffering from a severe food shortage caused by flooding of the Red River and the wartime disruption of the transportation network. A large body of foreign troops would only serve to aggravate the near-famine conditions in many parts of the country.

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The requirement for a minimum force was also based on the belief that "the Chinese would have to secure their zone only until the French could re-establish their control." The basis for this extraordinary conclusion is not clear. As we have seen, General Wedemeyer did not believe that the French would be allowed to return to Indo-China simply as a matter of course. In his own guidance for the American liaison teams Wedemeyer stressed the fact that "the ultimate political fate of Indo-China remains to be decided."* Still, there

* (U) China Theatre History, ibid.

was much in the public pronouncements of the American government which could have led the planners to believe that the United States acknowledge French sovereignty in Indo-China. In any case the theatre planners regarded the occupation of Indo-China as a rather unimportant side-show next to the pressing problems of Manchuria, Korea, and north China.*

* Interviews with Gen Gallagher, Gen McClure, Reginal Ungern. D ?

In his directive General Wedemeyer had assigned first priority to the re-occupation of areas of China proper which had fallen under enemy control, second priority to Korea, Manchuria and Formosa and third priority to Indo-China.* Three of the four Chinese armies

* (C) Op Direction #25 HQ USFCT, 28 August 1945. China Theatre Files.

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assigned to the occupation, the 52d, the 62d and the 93d were, in fact, scheduled for early redeployment to Formosa and Manchuria after they completed their task of disarming the Japanese in northern Vietnam. The fourth Chinese army, the 60th, with a strength of about 38,000 men and a "very good" rating from its American advisors, was to remain in the country.

In contrast to the agreed plan which called for "a minimum force," some 125,000 to 150,000 Chinese troops were to be stationed in, or pass through, northern Indo-China between October, 1945, and the spring of 1946. The 93d Chinese Army never passed through at all. Assigned to "secure the length of the Red River and relieve the 52d Army at Hanoi,"* it instead "took up positions in the highlands of Laos, where

* (U) China Theatre History p. 31.

no Japanese had ever been, so that it might control the opium poppy harvest. The division refused to leave Indo-China until September, 1946...when a second crop became available."* All this for the purpose

* John T. McAlister Vietnam: The Origins of Revolution (New York: Doubleday, 1971) p. 211.

of disarming and interning a force of less than 50,000 Japanese.

The reason for the wide divergence between the American plans and the Chinese actualities lay in the different conceptions of the occupation held by the Chinese and the Americans. The Americans looked upon the occupation of Indo-China as simply an unimportant, but necessary, bit of post-war housekeeping. General Wedemeyer instructed

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his commanders that there was to be "no intimation (given to the press) that U.S. personnel are in French Indo-China for any mission other than a humanitarian one."*

* (C) Wedemeyer, Radiogram on Censorship, 31 August 1945; China Theatre Files

To the Chinese, on the other hand, the occupation was, as John E. McAlister has aptly observed, "a projection of the warlord politics of South China onto the revolutionary scene of northern Viet Nam."*

* McAlister, op. cit., p. 209.

Of the troops chosen for the occupation more than sixty per cent were Yunnanese soldiers of the warlord general Lung Yun. They were commanded by his cousin, Lieutenant General Lu Han, who also served as commanding general of all the occupation troops. The nationalist government in Chungking wished to weaken Lung Yun's military strength by sending the bulk of his troops to Vietnam, and early in the occupation took advantage of the situation to depose Lung Yun and appoint Lu Han as his successor.

Lu Han neither trusted, nor was trusted by, the central government of China and pursued his own policies, which were sometimes at variance with those of Chungking. This important fact, that Lu Han was conducting the occupation for his own ends and not those of the central government, was never fully understood by either the Americans or the French.

Basically Lu Han's aims were to enrich himself and his supporters at

the expense of the Vietnamese, to settle old scores with the French,

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and to manipulate the volatile political forces unleashed by the Japanese surrender.

General Wedemeyer assigned a small group of Americans drawn from the Chinese Combat Command as liaison teams with each of the major components of Lu Han's "First Army Group." All of these teams were under the direct command of Brigadier General Philip E. Gallagher, commander First Army Group, Chinese Combat Command, who acted as Lu Han's advisor.

The Chinese Combat Command had come into being on January 9, 1945, to train and advise the Chinese units of the new "Alpha" forces, which were being prepared and equipped by the United States to take the offensive against the Japanese in China.* Its mission was to "assist

* See Romanus and Sunderland op. cit., Vol. III pp. 56-67 and passim.

and advise Chinese Commanders" at each command level on their operations. They were specifically precluded, however, from "exercising command over Chinese forces."* The CCC was organized into cadres of about

* (U) General Wedemeyer's Data Book p. 12, Wedemeyer Files.

25 officers and 50 enlisted men.

In his instructions to General Gallagher's liaison teams, Major General Robert B. McClure, commander of CCC, stated that the primary task of the teams would be to assist and advise the Chinese in the acceptance of the Japanese surrender and in the subsequent occupation of Vietnam. Assistance might be rendered in such areas as "troop

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movements, interpretation and execution of surrender terms and evacuation of POW's." The American cadres were to report on the "effectiveness and spirit of the Chinese enforcement of the terms of surrender" and to give all possible assistance and supplies to Allied P.O.Ws.*

* (C) Major General Robert B. McClure "Instructions to CCC Liaison Teams" 4 September 1945. China Theatre Files

General McClure's instructions said nothing about political matters. Indeed, Gallagher and his men neither expected nor received any explicit political guidance from any level of command.* To them the occupation

* Gallagher to Bernard B. Fall, 30 March 1956. Gallagher Papers, OCMH; Gen Gallagher 13 January, 1972.

was basically a logistical problem involving primarily the prompt disarming of the Japanese and the repatriation of Allied prisoners. As for the political future of Indo-China, many believed it would eventually go back to France, others expected that it would attain independence or enter a trusteeship status, and others simply did not know. All were agreed that it was not a matter of any great moment.*

* Interviews with Gen. Gallagher, Colonel John H. Stodter, Reginald Ungern, 18 November 1971; E. S. Waddell 13 January 1972.

General Gallagher arrived in Hanoi September 14, 1945. He had been preceded, however, by other elements of his command with the advance divisions of the Chinese Army and by personnel of the OSS and Air Ground Aid Service, who were unconnected with the Chinese Combat

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Command.

Among the first Americans to enter Indo-China after the cessation of hostilities were the members of a joint OSS Air Ground Aid Service*

* The Air Ground Aid Service was primarily concerned with the location and repatriation of Allied pilots shot down over enemy held territory.

team, code name "Quail," under the command of Captain Archimedes L. Patti who had previously commanded a wartime OSS mission to Indo-China. The team, consisted of Patti and three other officers along with nine enlisted men and five French officers. Patti's primary mission was to secure the Hanoi airfield, to make preparations for the Japanese surrender and the arrival of the allied occupation troops, and to search for American prisoners of war. His secondary mission was to supply intelligence to Chungking about conditions in Indo-China.

The French contingent was commanded by Major Jean Sainteny, head of the French intelligence mission in Kunming. As Sainteny saw his mission he was to prepare the way for a French return to Tonkin.

Patti's group arrived in Vietnam on August 22, 1945, landing at Gialam air-field, across the river from Hanoi.* The city which

* (C) "Report of G-5 to Shanghai Base Command, 2 January 1946, China Theatre Files."

the Americans entered was in the midst of one of the most important and dramatic events in the modern history of Vietnam. On August 19, several hundred troops of the Vietminh entered the city and proceeded to

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occupy the principal government buildings and the radio station. The puppet government which the Japanese had installed after their March takeover, was expelled and five days later, in Hue, the Emperor Bao Dai, descendant of the last of the Nguyen lords of Vietnam, abdicated in favor of "the Democratic Republic of Vietnam." He received the new title of "Supreme Political Advisor" to the new nation. On August 30th, in an impressive ceremony, carefully stage-managed by the Viet-minh, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the independence of Vietnam in an address to a crowd of some 500,000 in Hanoi.

The "August Revolution," as it soon came to be called, was a complex phenomenon. It was not a popular uprising, although it did not lack popular support. It was not staged by the Japanese, although they did nothing to discourage it and were to prove helpful to the Vietminh in various ways. It was managed by the communist-dominated Viet-Minh but it had a broad base of support among the entire educated elite of Vietnam.

None of this was very well understood by the Americans of the OSS and the CCC. The familiarity of Americans with Vietnamese nationalism was small. Intent upon what they conceived to be their "main mission" of advising the Chinese, repatriating allied P.O.Ws, and disarming the Japanese, they had little time for, or interest in, the momentous events unfolding around them. For this reason their actions were often misinterpreted and they were sometimes led into errors of conduct or judgement of which they were only half aware. The Patti mission, in particular, despite its very minor importance, became the subject of bitter controversy.

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Major Sainteny was later to accuse Patti of deliberately delaying the departure of the mission for more than a week after the Japanese surrender,* and of engaging in anti-French and pro-Vietminh activities.

* Sainteny Historie d'un Paix Mangeu ^(Mangue?) (Paris: Fayard, 1953) p. 67.

Other French writers have accused Patti's men of openly siding with the Vietminh against the French, of conducting an anti-French propaganda campaign, and of prospecting for economic advantages for American business.*

* See General G. Sabattier Le Destin de l' Indochine (Paris 1952) p. 334-340 and Pierre Maurice Dessinges "Les Intrigues International en Indo Chine" Le Monde 13 April 1947.

There is little documentary material on the Patti mission and none that would serve either to confirm or refute these charges. Everyone who met Patti agreed that he was a volatile and highly excitable young man whose enthusiasm sometimes outran his judgement. General Gallagher characterized him as "an alarmist." "He talks too much" complained the general "tends to freewheel, and loves to appear mysterious. When I enter a room I expect to see him come out from under a rug."* Gallagher's G-2, Colonel John C. Bane, reported

* Gallagher to General R. B. McCure, 20 September 1945, Gallagher papers, OCMH, Washington, D.C. Interview with Gen Gallagher.

that "...some statements of Captain Patti were ill-considered and not

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in accord with the understood U.S. policy."*

* Bane to Gallagher, 15 September 1945, "F.I.C. Files, General A. C. Wedemeyer Files.

On the other hand, Patti himself had complaints against the French. On the 28th of September he reported "numerous instances of Frenchmen, wearing U.S. uniforms and representing themselves as Americans, engaging in anti-social and obnoxious activities" in order to discredit U.S. Forces in particular and Americans in general" in the eyes of the Vietnamese.*

* (C) CGUSCT to Gallagher, September 27, 1945 F.I.C. Radios. Wedemeyer Files; Gallagher observed caustically that "the French efforts to represent themselves as Americans was due to a desire to save their skin." Gallagher to USFCT 28 Sept 1945, F.I.C. Radios.

Patti also had good reasons for attempting to delay Sainteny's arrival in Indo-China, if indeed he did so. Both the O.S.S. and C.C.C. were suspicious of Sainteny and believed his presence in Indo-China would be a destabilizing factor. General McClure's Headquarters described him as "a troublemaker of the first water, seeking only France's interests at the expense of China-American relations." The General and his Chinese opposite number, General Ho Ying Chin, believed that Sainteny might be planning "to seize hostages or cause the assassination of prominent American or Chinese officials and cite these incidents as indications of Chinese inefficiency and incapacity to maintain law

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and order (in Indo-China").* They were naturally anxious to prevent

* McClure to Wedemeyer, 21 September 1945, 2 October 1945;
Wedemeyer Files.

this "under cover agent of DeGualle" from entering Vietnam.

In Hanoi Patti's men set up headquarters in the Hotel Metropole where they were joined, on August 24, by eight additional men. The French, "as a protective measure," were interned by the Japanese in the former palace of the Governor-General.

During the turbulent days of the August Revolution, the OSS men did their best to safe-guard the lives of French nationals in Hanoi.* Patti

* Drachman op. cit., pp. 141-142 Abbott Low Moffat, "Memorandum of Conversation with Major A.L. Patti," 5 December 1946, Record Gp 59.

later thought that only the presence of the armed Americans had prevented a massacre of French civilians by the aroused Vietnamese.*

* Moffat op. cit.

An American officer observed that the French civilians living in Hanoi were "terrified of the Annamese. Their homes are being looted by armed bands of Annamese and Frenchmen found on the streets at night are frequently jailed for short periods."*

* LT COL John Bane to Gallagher, 15 Sept 1945, F.I.C. Files
R.G. 407. (U)

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Even more serious was the plight of the French and other European prisoners in the old Citadel in Hanoi. In August, 1945, there were about 4,500 prisoners in the Citadel, mainly Foreign Legionnaires who had been interned after the Japanese takeover in March.* The health

* (U) Colonel Stephen Nordlinger to John C. Bane n.d. Sept 1945.

and sanitary conditions in the Citadel were described by one of Patti's men as "incredibly bad." The prison hospital, designed to accommodate 150, had 290 patients, half of them critically ill. The death rate was running at about six or seven per day.*

* (U) Ibid. (C) Report of G-5 to Shanghai Base Command 2 Jan 1946.

These prisoners were the special concern of Colonel Stephen Nordlinger's Civil Affairs and Military Government Group, a small unit of about seven officers and thirteen enlisted men who arrived in Hanoi two days after the O.S.S. mission. Nordlinger's mission was primarily humanitarian. He was to locate and aid Allied P.O.Ws and "to do everything possible to secure the humanitarian treatment of all elements of the civil community..."*

* Drachman, op. cit., pp. 140-141.

One of Nordlinger's first tasks was to try to expand the hospital capacity of the Citadel as rapidly as possible. By late September his group and the AGAS had succeeded in providing a 400-bed facility to replace the old 150-bed hospital.* From American headquarters in

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* (U) Bane to Gallagher 15 September 1942. F.I.C. Files.

Kunming and from the Red Cross Nordlinger was able to obtain a considerable quantity of medical supplies as well as emergency food items, such as powdered milk.* Nordlinger also persuaded the Vietminh to return

* Drachman op. cit. pp. 142-143.

control of all the Hanoi hospitals to French medical personnel.

It seemed to the French in Hanoi that an obvious way to alleviate their plight would be to release the able-bodied prisoners in the Citadel and restore their arms to them. They could then "protect" the French civilians in the city from the Vietnamese. The Americans, however, refused to consider the proposal. They believed that to release and arm the French P.O.Ws would be "a partisan act" which could easily result in civil war. It was also contrary to their instructions that "American forces are not to be involved in the internal political struggle" in Vietnam.* This decision earned the

* (C) Report of G-5 to Shanghai Base Command.

United States the lasting enmity of many French "colons," who interpreted the American failure to release their prisoners as a sign of support for the Vietminh.

The French had tried and failed to move General Alessandri's troops, who had escaped to China after the March coup, back into Tonkin. A request by the French Military Mission in Washington for air transport for 5,000 of Alessandri's troops was turned down by

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the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who explained that "U.S. aircraft are already fully committed to other urgent tasks" and asserted that "the movement of French forces from China into Indo-China is a matter for consideration by the Chinese and French government."*

* (C) "Memorandum by the U.S. Chiefs of Staff to the Combined Chiefs of Staff," 11 September 1945, CCS644/35 R.G. 165.

This was the situation in mid-September, 1945, when the Chinese occupation armies entered Hanoi. The Vietminh remained in control, the French were helpless to oust them. The Japanese were passive and the Americans of the OSS and the Civil Affairs group had refused to act to change the status quo.

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CHAPTER VI

GENERAL GALLAGHER IN HANOI

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The Chinese armies, hindered by the flooding⁹ the Red River Valley, advanced slowly into Tonkin and reached Hanoi only on 15 September. The 62d Army, proceeding farther south, reached its final objectives only in the first week of October.* Arriving with the Chinese, General

* (U) China Theatre History, Chapter 15, p. 32.

Gallagher and his staff brought the total number of Americans in Hanoi to about sixty. The figure included all of the men of the OSS, AGAS and Civil Affairs Groups, as well as those under Gallagher's immediate command.* This tiny group of Americans had by now become the focus

* (C) Bane to Gallagher 15 September 1945; F.I.C. papers Wedemeyer files. (U) "Alert Plan for American Personnel in Hanoi" 24 September 1945 F.I.C. files.

of many extravagant hopes and fears on the part of both the Vietnamese and the French.

The Vietnamese greeted the arrival of the Americans with great enthusiasm "as a symbol of liberation, not from the Japanese, but from decades of French colonial rule."* Fastening on the example of the

* (U) Unpublished Report of Arthur Hale, U.S.I.S., November 1945, copy in Gallagher Papers.

Philippines (which were then about to receive their independence) and the high sounding declarations of the Atlantic Charter, many Vietnamese expected that the United States would champion their own revolution. They hoped that, after independence was achieved, the United States

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would provide a large measure of economic and technical assistance as well as perhaps some political tutelage.* The French, on the other

* This was the impression received by nearly all Americans in Indo-China at this time. In addition to Hale op. cit., See Gallagher to McClure 20 September 1945, Gallagher Papers, and Gallagher interview with author, Reginald Ungern interview with author, Major T.M. Mullen to Gallagher, 26 September 1945. F.I.C. Files. Records of China Theatre

hand, greeted the Americans as allies and as welcome protectors against the Vietnamese. "The French are extremely friendly and look to us for protection," reported Lieutenant Colonel Bane.

Untroubled by their recent record of collaboration with the Japanese, the French expected that the Americans would immediately take steps to return control of the colony to them.* Both groups were to be sorely

* Bane op. cit. Hale op. cit.

disappointed. The French disappointment was more immediate, but that of the Vietnamese was to be more lasting and, in the end, more significant.

It was not the handful of Americans in Hanoi, however, but the Chinese who, for the moment, held the fate of northern Vietnam in their hands. Specifically, it was the Yunan war-lord, General Lu Han. The general, as we have seen, had his own ideas and plans for Indo-China. These plans did not include aiding the French to regain their colony. Lu Han flatly refused the advice offered him by Colonel Nordlinger that the Vietminh forces in Hanoi be disarmed,* and he promptly expelled

* Banes to Gallagher, 15 September 1945. F.I.C. Files. Sainteny op. cit., p. 98.

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the small French mission under Sainteny from the palace of the Governor-General. The Chinese made no move either to release the many French soldiers still held in the Citadel or to interfere in any way with the day-to-day functioning of the Vietminh government. General Gallagher, who had received no clear guidance himself about what the political future of Vietnam was to be, generally approved Lu Han's actions. He did, however, support Nordlinger's efforts to alleviate conditions for the French P.O.W's and bring about their early release.*

* Author's interview with General Gallagher.

This was not enough to satisfy the French, who were soon accusing Gallagher and his staff officers of covertly working to undermine French interests. "Political significance was read into everything" said or done by the Chinese Combat Command, and many Frenchmen saw the actions of the Americans as part of a great propaganda campaign to impress the Vietnamese with the wealth and power of the Americans and discredit the French.*

* See particularly the works by Dessinges, Sabattier, and Sainteny cited above.

General Gallagher's real feelings about the revolution he was witnessing are not easy to analyse. Upon his arrival in Hanoi he was presented with confused and often contradictory reports on the Vietminh by the officers of the units that had preceeded him. Colonel Nordlinger and his G-2, LT COL John C. Bane, believed that the Vietminh were a

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Japanese-sponsored organization, had "a menacing attitude," and constituted a threat to good order. They urged the occupying authorities to disarm the Vietminh troops. Once Ho's government had lost its coercive power "a more democratic organization would probably evolve under new leadership" to take its place.*

*

(C) Bane to Gallagher, 15 September 1945. F.I.C. Files.

Major T.M. Mullins of Gallagher's own staff reported that Ho, although "a disciple of communism," was "pro-American" and "sincere in his political motives and anxious to co-operate with the Americans."*

*

(U) Mullins to Gallagher, 26 September 1945, Gallagher Papers.

General Gallagher himself, while recognizing that Ho Chi Minh was "an old revolutionist" and "a product of Moscow," nevertheless understood that "the Prime Minister and his party represented the real aspirations of the Vietnamese people for independence."*

*

(U) Gallagher to McClure, 20 September 1945, Gallagher Papers.

In his conversations with Ho, the general quickly discovered that the Vietnamese leader looked to the United States for support. "He looks upon America as the savior of all small nations and is basing all his actions on the statement in the Atlantic Charter that the independence of the smaller nations would be assured by the major powers.....I pointed out frankly that my job was not as a representative of the State Department nor was I interested in the political

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situation...that I was merely working with Lu Han. Confidentially I wish the Annamites could be given their independence, but, of course we have no voice in this matter."

The general's political neutrality was lost on the French. They knew only that men of their army were still prisoners in the Citadel and that neither Lu Han nor Gallagher had given any indication that they recognized French sovereignty in Tonkin.

On 18 September in a casual conversation with General Gaston Wang of the Chinese Army, General Gallagher observed that the Vietminh's opposition to the return of the French was so strong that the entrance of French troops into northern Indo-China "at this time would probably initiate armed conflict or disturbances which would make it difficult for Lu Han to maintain peace and order."* General Wang, who had many

* (C) Gallagher to Headquarters, CCC, 21 September 1945.

friends and associates among the French Colons, promptly reported the conversation to Sainteny, who in turn reported it to Paris.* By the

* Gallagher interview with author.

time news of the conversation reached the State Department by way of a protest from the Quai d'Orsay, the conversation had become a "secret conference" between Gallagher, Wang, and Alessandri. General Gallagher was alleged to have said that the Allies had not yet recognized French sovereignty and that premature participation by the French in the occupation might precipitate a conflict. The General was also alleged

to have declared that "there could be no question of the restoration of French sovereignty to Indo-China."*

* Headquarters, CCC to Gallagher, 21 September 1945, F.I.C. Files.

General Gallagher rushed to General Wang's apartment and demanded that the Chinese officer explain the true version of their conversation and its circumstances.* Wang eventually agreed and Gallagher enclosed

* Gallagher interview with author.

his statement in a letter to General McClure denying that he had ever held a "secret meeting with Wang and Allesandri" and giving what he considered to be the correct version of his conversation.*

* (C) Gallagher to McClure, 21 September 1945.

The General's explanation was accepted by CCC and by General Wedemeyer, who cautioned him to be more circumspect in future conversations.* At the same time General McClure informed Gallagher that

* (C) CG, China Theatre to Gallagher, 30 September 1945, F.I.C. radios.

the Chinese government "recognized French sovereignty in Indo-China" and desired that the Generalissimo's "representatives in China facilitate the resumption of French administration." As for American policy, "it remains hands off."*

* McClure to Gallagher CFBx8092 (no date) September 1945.

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As has been noted, Lu Han and his associates had no intention of "facilitating" the return of French rule. The warlord general was unimpressed by McClure's radio, which Gallagher showed to him. He claimed to have received no orders of this type from his headquarters and warned Gallagher that any show of support for the French on his part might turn the Vietnamese against the Chinese populace in Hanoi.* At a meeting

* (U) Gallagher to McClure, 27 September 1945, Gallagher Papers.

with French representatives on the 21st of September the war-lord general "emphasized the point that he was in command in north Indo-China and that he would show no partiality to either French or Annamite."*

* (U) "Memorandum for the Record" 21 September 1945; Gallagher Papers.

Lu Han's continued hostility towards the French could be observed in his conduct during the formal surrender ceremony in Hanoi at the end of September. The French General Allesandri, who had flown in especially for the occasion, was not permitted to attend in an official capacity because of his "unclear position."* He was placed one hundred

* King C. Chen Vietnam and China 1938-1954 (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1969) p. 125.

and fourteenth among the "guests."*

* McAlister Origins p. 212.

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Lu Han also indicated to Gallagher that he did not intend to allow the French flag to be flown alongside the flags of the other Allied nations at the surrender ceremony.* A direct appeal from both Gallagher

* (C) Gallagher to CG, USFCT, 27 September 1945, F.I.C. radios.

and Allesandri to raise the flag was turned down, and Lu Han informed the American general that he would not raise the flag unless specially ordered to do so by higher headquarters.* Two days later China Theatre

* (C) CG, USFCT to Gallagher, 29 September 1945, F.I.C. radios.

confidentially advised Gallagher that the Chinese high command would instruct Lu Han to display the French flag at the surrender.* Whether

* Ibid.

such an order was ever actually sent to the general in Hanoi cannot be determined, but in any case, Lu Han did not raise the French flag at the surrender. He gave as his reason the danger that the sight of the French banner might touch off rioting by the Vietnamese.*

* Ibid.

Allessandri departed the scene in a rage, but the humiliation of the French was far from ended. That evening Lu Han issued a public proclamation in which he warned "the enemy of Vietnam" that if he "dared to stir up any bloody tragedy" he would be severely punished.*

* (U) Gallagher to McClure, 27 September 1945, Gallagher Papers.

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The proclamation was obviously aimed at the French.

Despite Lu Han's continued hostility, General Gallagher did his best, after the receipt of McClure's message, to improve the position of the French in Hanoi. On 26 September he met with General Alessandri, explained the position of the Chinese government in Chungking, and indicated his willingness to be of assistance.* Alessandri was

* Ibid.

"overjoyed" and quickly presented Gallagher with a long list of measures he wished to see taken by the Chinese. These included the immediate rearming of the French police and military, the release of all remaining prisoners in the Citadel, and the return of control of the radio station and public utilities to the French.*

* Memorandum by Lieutenant Reginald Ungern, A.O.C. to General Gallagher Papers.

The Frenchman was also anxious to have Chinese and American troops sent to protect the Europeans in the outlying towns and cities of northern Vietnam such as Hoa Binh, Hue, Vinh and Tourane (Danang).*

* (C) McKay to Nordlinger, 19 September 1945, F.I.C. Miscellaneous Papers.

Although the French general was not aware of it, small parties of Americans were already in these cities, working to help the French.

The first Americans to enter the cities of northern Vietnam were

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elements of Colonel Nordlinger's Civil Affairs Group, under the command of Captain Thomas McKay, McKay visited Vinh, Hue and Danang early in September in search of allied P.O.W's. He appears to have been convinced that the Vietminh, who by this time had seized control of local government everywhere in the area, were Japanese-controlled puppets. "In none of the cities visited could the Japs explain why they permitted a government they did not support and accept to maintain an Army."* The fact that the Vietminh had obviously obtained many

* Ibid.

of their arms from the Japanese served to confirm McKay's suspicions. Even a gigantic welcoming ceremony held for the Americans by the Vietminh government at Vinh failed to allay McKay's hostility to the nationalists. The fact that "everything was prepared for us" seemed only further proof that the Vietminh were in league with the Japanese since "only the Japs knew that we were coming."*

* Ibid.

McKay did his best to aid the French civilians he found in the towns he visited. His medics gave them medical assistance and distributed small amounts of medical supplies. He sternly warned the Japanese that "pending the arrival of the Chinese, the Japanese alone are responsible for the maintenance of peace and security." The Vietminh were told that they would be held individually and collectively responsible for any unlawful acts against the French.* At Vinh, McKay

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* (C) McKay to Nordlinger, 2 October 1945, F.I.C. Miscellaneous Files.

succeeded in persuading the Vietminh to transfer a group of 50 Frenchmen from a prison camp to more comfortable quarters in a pagoda but failed in his attempt to have them released altogether.*

* Ibid.

American advisors accompanying the Chinese 62d Army likewise attempted to ameliorate the condition of the French. The troops of the 62d displayed little interest in the plight of the French, as they moved across central Tonkin from Tsingsi to Cao Bango, Langson, and Haiphong, from whence they were to embark for Manchuria. They made no move to protect French citizens and property until the senior American advisor, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas G. Maris, persuaded the general in command to provide guards for French civilians and to protect French property.*

* Maris to Gallagher, 14 September 1945, F.I.C., Miscellaneous Files.

Maris was even more hostile to the Vietminh than Captain McKay. He considered all Frenchmen, even those who had been part of the Vichy regime a short time before, as "allies." "Any action taken against them would be an act against Allied interests." If the French interests and "Allied interests" were one and the same, as Maris apparently

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believed, then the Vietminh could only be seen as a threat to the Allied cause. "I still do not believe" he complained to General Gallagher, "that the Chinese have gone far enough in assuring that the communistic elements give no more trouble.... All weapons (must) be taken from these people who are using them against the interests of the Allies." He added that the Vietminh "seem to be controlled mainly by the mob demonstration spirit" and while "very fixed about independence," had "no real knowledge of fighting and will scatter at the first few shots."*

* Maris to Gallagher, 14 September 1945 F.I.C. Miscellaneous File.

In Hanoi, Gallagher soon found that Lu Han had different ideas about the Vietminh and the sanctity of "Allied interests." At Gallagher's urging the Chinese war-lord grudgingly agreed to release all the remaining French prisoners of war from the Citadel and also to provide a small amount of gasoline to the French Military Mission. More than this he would not do. His reasons were the same: he had received no clear instructions from his headquarters, and he feared reprisals against the local Chinese population if his army appeared to be aiding the French.* When Gallagher suggested to Chungking that Lu Han be

* (U) "Memorandum of Conference, 5 September 1945" Gallagher Papers, Gallagher to McClure 27 September 1945.

given firm and unequivocal instructions from the Generalissimo on the Chinese government's policy, General Wedemeyer replied that this was

a Chinese matter and that he was unwilling to "initiate any action

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which might be construed as an indication that this [China Theatre] Headquarters intends to take any part in the Indo-China political situation."*

* (C) CG, China Theatre to Gallagher 4 October 1945 F.I.C.
Radios.

Chinese and American help to the French, small and ineffective as it was, was still enough to alarm the Vietminh. General Gallagher reported "a noticeable change in the attitude of the Annamites toward the Americans here...since they became aware of the fact that we were not going to interfere and would probably help the French."* In a

* (C) CG, China Theatre to Gallagher, 4 October 1945, F.I.C.
Radios.

meeting with Gallagher and Captain Patti, Prime Minister Ho "expressed the fear that the Allies considered Indo-China a conquered country and that the Chinese came as conquerers." Gallagher and Patti attempted to reassure him and also urged Ho to continued his negotiations with the French over "the present difficulties."

The worst difficulties, however, were still to come. During early October tension and violence in Hanoi rose nearly to crisis proportions. This new level of tension was directly related to, and influenced by events in Indo-China south of the 16th parallel.*

* (U) Gallagher to McClure, 27 September 1945, Gallagher Papers.

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CHAPTER VII

"THERE IS A SORT OF DRUGSTORE REVOLUTION GOING ON HERE"

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South of the 16th parallel the fact that the responsibility for the occupation lay with the British was of crucial importance. Unlike the Chinese, the British did nothing to interfere with the resumption of control by the French. Indeed, in many important ways, they actually facilitated their return to power.

The British occupation forces under the command of General Douglas D. Gracey arrived in Saigon around the middle of September to find that city, like Hanoi, in the hands of a nationalist revolutionary government; but there were important differences. In the north, the Vietminh were "the only show in town" with no serious rivals for the leadership of the independence movement. In the south they competed for leadership with the Trotskyite Dai Viet party, the old pro-Japanese Phuc Quoc Party, and the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects. At the time of the arrival of the occupation forces, the governing "Provisional Executive Committee for the South" had only four Vietminh members out of a total of thirteen.*

* Buttinger op. cit., p. 324.

General Gracey had been given strict instructions by his superior, Admiral Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia Command not to "interfere in the internal affairs of Indo-China." Almost from the first, Gracey nevertheless violated both the letter and the spirit of his instructions. As he was about to leave for Indo-China, he observed that "the question of the government of Indo-China is exclusively French. Civil and military control by the French

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is only a matter of weeks."* When he was welcomed by the Vietnamese

* Ibid.

leaders upon his arrival in Saigon, Gracey, in his own words, "promptly kicked them out."*

* Fall, Two Vietnams, p. 64.

From the outset, the general made it clear that, unlike Lu Han and Gallagher in the north, he was unwilling to work with and through the existing native government. On the contrary, he demanded that all Vietnamese be disarmed and informed the local Japanese commander, General Terauchi, that he would be responsible for maintaining "order."

The Nationalists staged a general strike on 17 September in protest against the actions of the British. Gracey responded on the 20th and 21st with a proclamation of martial law, a suspension of all Vietnamese newspapers, and a ban on all demonstrations and public meetings. Most important, he released and rearmed about 1400 French prisoners-of-war who had been interned in the Saigon area since the Japanese takeover in March 1945. The French promptly reoccupied all of the public buildings and evicted the Vietnamese from the post offices and police stations. Large numbers of Vietnamese were "arrested" and many others were beaten up or killed by the French.

The Committee of the South answered with a crippling general strike and widespread acts of sabotage. On the evening of 24 September members of the Binh Xuyen, a Mafia-style nationalist political sect, entered a residential section of Saigon called the Cité Hérault and

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massacred more than 150 civilians, mostly women and children. From this point civil war was general throughout the south with British and even Japanese troops supporting the French against the Vietminh and other nationalists.

The American role in the south was more spectacular although much less important than in the north. As early as August 10th OSS Detachment 404 based on Ceylon had begun plans for an intelligence and observer group to accompany the Allies to Saigon. This project, which received the code name "Embankment," had a number of widely divergent objectives. A primary purpose was to locate and render aid to Allied prisoners-of-war, particularly Americans, and to identify and track down Japanese war criminals. In addition, the members of the mission were to "locate and inventory all property of the United States government and of American citizens, and confiscate or microfilm all Japanese documents and code books of strategic value." Other objectives of the mission were to "report on future political trends" and to keep track of the activities of any anti-Allied or pro-Japanese political groups.* The OSS men were instructed to reveal only as much of their

* (S) Major Amos D. Moscrip "A Plan to Penetrate Saigon," 10 August 1945, records of OSS, Central Intelligence Agency.

mission objectives to the French authorities "as will not offend their sensibilities."*

* Ibid.

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The man selected to command "Embankment" was Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Peter Dewey. Dewey spoke fluent French and had served with [redacted] France and North Africa, but his knowledge of current conditions in Indo-China was spotty. In a memorandum on "French Policy in the Far East," prepared for Detachment 404 in August, 1945, Dewey made no mention of the nationalist stirrings in Vietnam and Laos but devoted his attention exclusively to what the French might do.

Like the French themselves, Dewey viewed the question of Indo-China primarily as a problem between France and her British, American, and Chinese allies. Dewey pointed out that the French were worried about the possibility of a joint British-American-Chinese trusteeship for Indo-China and were determined to place elements of their army in southern Indo-China as "soon as possible."* The task of the "Embankment"

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[redacted]

team was envisioned to be one of accompanying these French units and observing the French effort in southern Vietnam.

On 1 September, the advance elements of "Embankment," a P.O.W. evacuation team under Lieutenant Emile R. Connasse, was parachuted into Saigon. The men were greeted "respectfully" by the Japanese and allowed to proceed with their work of locating and evacuating P.O.Ws.*

[redacted]

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Connasse dismissed the Vietnamese establishment of an independent government as "a drugstore revolution" but did acknowledge that "for the present their control is complete."*

* Ibid.

On the day after their arrival, the Americans were witness to a massive demonstration and parade by several hundred thousand men and women organized by the Committee for the South. Intended by the Vietminh as a demonstration of solidarity, the parade was soon manipulated by extremists into an attack on the French residents of the city. Dozens of French men and women were beaten up or arbitrarily thrown into jail and their homes looted.

This was the first serious breakdown of public order since the Committee for the South had taken control and it was to be the last until well after the arrival of the British and French.* But the

* Buttinger op. cit., pp. 320-321, Ellen Hammer The Struggle for Indochina (Stanford 1954) pp. 108-109.

Americans of the "Embankment" team could not know this. To these men who had arrived one day before the riot, the revolutionary government seemed naturally prone to violence and disorder. Many of its actions "appeared crazy or unexplainable."*

* Buttinger, Ibid.

The Americans purchased the large Continental Palace Hotel to

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serve as a refuge for French civilians who claimed to be in imminent danger from the lawless Vietnamese. Since the hotel was at that point American property, the Japanese were obliged to guard it against attacks by the Vietnamese.*

* (U) Interview with Frank White 26 February 1972.

Colonel Dewey arrived with the remainder of the "Embankment" Team on the 4th of September and relieved Lieutenant Connasse, who returned to Ceylon on the 6th. Dewey and his executive officer, Captain Herbert Bluechel, continued to do their best to protect French civilians but, in addition, they established close contact with the leaders of the independence movement.

After the arrival of the British and French, Dewey was under considerable pressure to break off his meetings with the Vietnamese.*

* (U) White Interview; (S) Major F.M. Small U.S.A., "Memorandum on the Death of Major Peter Dewey," 25 October 1945; (S) Dewey to HQ 404 14 September 1945.

General Gracey claimed that Dewey was going outside normal command channels and that his actions would be interpreted by the Vietnamese as evidence of official American support for the independence movement in southern Vietnam.* On the 14th of September Gracey formally ordered

* White Interview.

the Embankment team to cease all intelligence activities until its mission in Saigon was "clarified." Dewey complained bitterly about

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this directive to his headquarters and evidently continued his intelligence activities until his recall on 22 September.

Fighting between the French and British and the Vietnamese was by this time general, but the Americans had experienced little difficulty until 24 September when Captain Joseph Coolidge was ambushed along with a British officer on a trip to Dalat. Coolidge was seriously wounded and had to be evacuated to Ceylon.

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In Hanoi word of the death of Colonel Dewey caused uneasiness among the Americans of General Gallagher's command. Prime Minister Ho Chi Minh hastened to the general's headquarters to express his regrets. He assured the Americans that such an incident would occur in the north only "over my dead body." The Prime Minister expressed the intention of writing personally to the State Department to explain the incident.*

*

(U) Ungern "Memorandum for the Record" 28 Sept 1945 Gallagher Papers.

Despite these assurances, unrest in the city continued to increase throughout the first two weeks of October. News of the French and British actions in the south frightened and angered the Vietnamese in Hanoi. There were numerous reports of beatings and murders of Frenchmen. At one point Major Sainteny was seized and imprisoned by a Vietnamese mob when he displayed a French flag on his car. At the insistence of the Americans he was soon released.

Scattered rioting and unruly street demonstrations continued throughout the month, climaxing on 23 October with the shooting by a mob of two French officers. The following day many French families found themselves without food when all Vietnamese markets and stores declared a boycott against sales to the French.

In a letter to General McClure, Gallagher observed that "the situation here is pregnant with possible trouble." The general advised Lu Han that "...unless the Provisional government can demonstrate at once that it can control the population...you will be forced to assume

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direct control."* Lu Han, however, was no more anxious than before

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"Memo for the Record" 26 Oct 45, Gallagher Papers.

to take upon himself the responsibility for governing northern Vietnam. He was content to leave this thankless task to the Provisional Government. As for the French, although he had promised Gallagher that "he would meet their requests, where possible," the American general reported that by the end of October Lu Han had given them "damn little."*

*

Ibid.

For his part the Chinese general complained that the French were "continually double-dealing" and that he had "very little confidence in their good faith."* Lu Han flatly refused to allow the French to

*

Ibid.

broadcast over the radio, which they claimed was being utilized by the Provisional Government to disseminate anti-French propaganda. Nor would the Chinese consider taking control of the radio station away from the Vietnamese. Lu Han also refused to turn over two large government buildings to the French military mission.*

*

(U) Ungern "Memorandum for the Record" 29 October 1945; Gallagher Papers.

An uneasy peace reigned in Hanoi, punctuated by sporadic outbursts of rioting and mob violence. The French, according to Gallagher,

"were itching to get on with the job" of repossessing their colony but

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could not do so in the face of the Chinese occupation army. Despite the tense atmosphere and sense of impending crisis, General Gallagher and his staff proceeded with the preparations for the transshipment of the Chinese troops of the 52d and 62d Chinese Armies north to Formosa and Manchuria.

To the men of Chinese Combat Command this was their primary mission. All else was secondary. From the time that Rear Admiral Elliott Buckmaster's task force anchored off Haiphong, the Americans in northern Vietnam were obliged to devote a large portion of their attention to the transfer of the armies. The time and energy they could devote to internal affairs in Hanoi was correspondingly limited.

General Gallagher sent two of his staff officers, Colonel John Hutson and Lt. Col. John H. Stodter, to meet with Admiral Buckmaster at Haiphong to work out the details of the movement. The harbor at Haiphong had been extensively mined during the war by the U.S. Air Force. The location of the mines could not now be determined and they were set to never become inoperative.*

* (U) Vice Admiral Elliott Buckmaster to Ronald Spector, 6 November 1971. Historians Files Office of the Chief of Military History.

General Gallagher and General Lu Han believed that to sweep the mines in the inner harbor of Haiphong would provide French troopships with easy access to the docks of the city. This might well help to bring on the civil war which both the Americans and Chinese hoped to avoid. Admiral Buckmaster, who was impressed with the gravity of the political situation, suggested that only the outer approaches to the

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harbor be swept. The ships of his task force could anchor there and the Chinese troops could be moved to the Ships in lighters.* Accordingly

* (U) "Memorandum for the Record" 29 October 1945; Memorandum for Record," 26 October 1945; Gallagher to McClure, 26 October 1945. All in Gallagher Papers.

Admiral Buckmaster commandeered all remaining Japanese minesweepers in the area and ordered their crews to sweep the mines in the outer harbor, a task they completed by October 22.

During the last week of October, the first elements of the 52d Army were loaded aboard seven Liberty ships bound for Formosa and Manchuria. General Gallagher and his staff personally supervised the loading of the troops which consumed most of the month of November. The general returned to Hanoi on the 29th to find a full-blown economic crisis in progress.

To understand the situation in Hanoi at the end of November it is important to bear in mind that the Chinese occupation of Vietnam was, as we have seen, an opportunistic exploitation by a group of Chinese warlords of a temporarily favorable situation. An important aspect of the warlord occupation was the deliberate manipulation of the Vietnamese currency system to enrich the Chinese. This was accomplished by arbitrarily setting the exchange rate between the Chinese dollar and the Vietnamese piaster at 13.33 Chinese dollars to 1 piaster, thus making the value of the Chinese dollar approximately three times greater in Hanoi than in neighboring Kunming.* The results

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have been graphically described by John McAlister: "...Every airplane arriving from Kunming brought with it great quantities of money to be exchanged and in one instance 60 million Chinese dollars were reported on a single flight. The Chinese began to buy up hotels shops, houses and similar sorts of real estate... By these and other financial operations including loans received from the Bank of Indo-China the Chinese occupation was estimated to have extracted 400 million Banks of Indo-China piasters...."* This in a country where the total

* McAlister op. cit. p. 124.

Gross National Product in 1939 had been around 1.14 billion dollars.

The peculiar financial situation soon caught the attention of General Gallagher's G-5, Lieutenant Colonel C. Radford Berry, who predicted that Lu Han's actions would bring about economic chaos. In a letter to General Gallagher the colonel remonstrated against the manipulation of the exchange rate, forced loans from the Bank of Indo-China, and the concurrent use of both Chinese and Vietnamese money as legal tender. "Continuation of these practices," he predicted. "will result in the collapse of the currency of Indo-China."*

* (U) C. Radford Berry to Gallagher, 18 October 1945, F.I.C. Files.

With considerable naiveté Berry attributed the Chinese financial manipulations to simple ignorance of the mechanics of finance. He suggested that General Gallagher despatch a memo on the subject to

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Lu Han in order to set him right.* On October 23, Berry optimistically

* Berry to Gallagher ibid. Gallagher forwarded Berry's memo to Lu Han.

observed that "it appears [my] memo has caused the Chinese to realize the gravity of the situation and provoked early action by them looking to a remedy."*

* (U) Berry to Gallagher, 25 October 1945, F.I.C. files.

Action proceeded but not in the manner envisioned by Colonel Berry. The Chinese continued with business as usual and, at the end of October, General Gallagher warned Lu Han that "the situation with respect to currency, ...is growing steadily worse."*

* (U) Gallagher to Lu Han 31 October 1945, Gallagher Papers.

On 14 November, the Chinese demanded that Sainteny arrange with the Bank of Indo-China to make available at least 600,000 piasters a day for exchange. They also demanded an immediate loan of 40,000,000 piasters to meet "urgent military needs."*

* King C. Chen op. cit. p. 135.

Sainteny, after some backing and filling, felt that he had no choice but to accept the Chinese demands. Not so the French government of Indo-China which was now functioning again in Saigon. The French authorities in the south not only rejected any further Chinese levies but issued a decree on 17 November, withdrawing all 500 piaster bank

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notes from circulation. All of the notes printed during the Japanese occupation from 9 March to 23 September were declared to be valueless. All other 500P notes were revalued at 70% of their face value and were to be deposited in special blocked accounts in the Bank of Indo-China.*

* "Decree of the High Commissioner of France for Indo-China" enclosure to Sainteny to Gallagher, 21 November 1945.

The French decreè caused consternation and panic among the Chinese and Vietnamese citizens of Hanoi. Many small tradesmen, merchants and artisans had put their life savings into one or two of these bills. There were riots and demonstrations, and large crowds besieged the offices of the Bank of Indo-China in Hanoi.*

* (U) Reginald Ungern "History of the \$500 (sic) Note Incident" unpublished mss in the Gallagher Papers.

The Chinese generals refused to accept the decree of the French High Commissioner. On 24 November, they notified Sainteny that they did not recognize the decree as being in effect north of the 16th parallel. Two days later the Chinese notified M. Baylin, the manager of the Hanoi Branch of the Bank of Indo-China, that unless the decree was rescinded immediately they could no longer be responsible for the safety of the bank.*

* Chen op. cit. p. 136.

The Vietminh, meanwhile, had organized a mass demonstration in front of the Bank of Indo-China. Believing that they had been fired on by the demonstrators, the Chinese guards in front of the bank opened fire on the crowd. Some Vietnamese apparently returned the fire, and the Chinese responded by tossing hand grenades into the crowd. In the confused fighting six Vietnamese blamed the French for the incident, but under pressure from the American advisory group the Chinese continued to guard the Bank. The Vietminh stepped up their anti-French propaganda campaign and organized a boycott by Vietnamese merchants against the French. Since the French were almost totally dependent on Vietnamese shops for food and clothing the boycott caused considerable hardship.

On 22 November Sainteny, after conferring with the French authorities, announced that "the invalidation of the 500 piaster note is a financial policy of the French government; no change will be made."* The Chinese

* Chen op. cit. p. 137.

responded by "arresting" the director and the branch manager of the Bank of Indo-China.

General Lu Han had absented himself from the city on the pretext of ill-health. He continued to stay away throughout the entire period of the financial crisis despite an urgent radio message from General Gallagher that his presence in the city was essential.*

* Ungern "History" p. 3.

In his absence the Chinese were commanded by General Yin,

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Lu Han's Deputy Chief of Staff.

At this junction General Gallagher returned to Hanoi from Haiphong. He immediately met with General Yin at Chinese Army headquarters, and quickly perceived that, so far as the Chinese army was concerned, the financial crisis was a hold up designed to coerce the French into honoring the 500 piaster notes. The American general demanded the immediate release of the bankers, pointing out to General Yin that neither they, nor any other local French official, had the authority to alter the financial policies of the French government. To break the deadlock's Gallagher suggested a round table meeting between the tow sides.*

*

(U) "Memorandum for the Record" 29 November 1945, Gallagher Papers.

The following afternoon the Frenchmen were released and Sainteny agreed to meet with the Chinese on 1 December at General Gallagher's residence. At the meeting the Chinese generals again attempted to bring pressure on the French by intimating that it "would be very difficult to maintain local peace in view of the (unpopular) measures taken by the French"* Sainteny refused to be intimidated and stood

*

(U) "Memorandum for the Record" 2 December 1945, Gallagher Papers.

firm. The Chinese next offered to raise the Chinese and Vietnamese merchant boycott of the French in return for co-operative behavior on the part of the bank. At this point General Gallagher remarked

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angrily that the two sides "could not solve the banking problem by having women and children go hungry." He stated that unless the Chinese Army intended to use the boycott to blackmail the French they ought to have it raised at once and volunteered to call personally on Ho Chi Minh to request that the Vietnamese also end their boycott.*

* Ibid.

On this note the meeting ended.

That same afternoon Gallagher met briefly with Prime Minister Ho Chi Minh, who agreed to try to stop the boycott but demanded that the French indemnify the families of the Vietnamese killed during the demonstration on 26 November. After leaving the Prime Minister, General Gallagher again met with the French and Chinese. Sainteny announced that high-level technical experts with full authority to make an agreement would be sent from Saigon to confer with the Chinese.

After a few days of acrimonious discussion, the two sides finally agreed upon a joint proclamation which declared that the 500 piaster notes would continue in circulation north of the 16th parallel. Persons possessing 500P notes in amounts greater than 5,000P were required to deposit them in special accounts in the Bank of Indo-China. They would be allowed a monthly withdrawal of up to 20 per cent of their balance. Individuals possessing smaller quantities of notes could exchange them at the Bank for face value.*

* The High Commissioner of France for Indo-China to General Lu Han 5 October 1945; in the Gallagher Papers.

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The 500 piaster note incident was General Gallagher's last major involvement in the internal affairs of Vietnam. Since early November China Theatre Command had become increasingly anxious to withdraw the CCC contingent from Indo-China in order to meet personnel needs elsewhere. General Gallagher however, believed that the continued presence of an American officer of flag rank in Hanoi was advisable. He remained in the capital with a steadily diminishing staff until December 12, 1945 when he was ordered to close out the American advisory mission.

For the next 18 months there were to be no more American military observers in northern Vietnam. The Chinese occupation continued without benefit of American advise (or restraint) until August 1946 when in return for considerable economic and political concessions on the part of the French Chiang Kai Shek's troops departed Tonkin. General warfare followed between the French and Vietminh in December 1946 after a number of unsuccessful attempts to reach a compromise.

General Gallagher's mission to Hanoi must certainly rank among the most difficult assignments of the wartime period. Gallagher and his men viewed their role as a purely military one of advising the Chinese Army. In Hanoi they found themselves caught up in a volatile political crises which they only dimly understood. They became focus of extravagant hopes on the part of both the French and the Vietnamese and their every action was viewed as politically significant. In this situation they were inevitably doomed to disappoint both the French and the Vietnamese and they did.

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The Gallagher mission was the last and perhaps the most important of a series of American military involvements with Indo-China dating back to 1943. During the period between 1943 and March 1945 American commanders felt compelled by their need for timely intelligence about Vietnam to cultivate the various political groups involved in the struggle for control of the country: the Free French, the Vichyites, the nationalist Chinese and the Vietminh. The Japanese take-over in March 1945 destroyed many of the traditional American sources of intelligence and ultimately led to more direct and intensive U.S. involvement in Indo-China. Finally the post-war Allied occupation of Vietnam led to American military participation, as advisors in the north and as observers in the south.

Little of the fruits of experience derived from the U.S. Army's three year involvement in Vietnamese affairs during 1943-1945 appears to have been made available to American policy-makers; and American military men, for their part, usually had a very imperfect understanding of American policy toward Southeast Asia.

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Memo for Exec Dir-Compt from B. Drell, Chief, CIA Historical Staff. Subj:	13 Nov 72
Request for CIA Concurrence in Unclassified publication of an official history	8 Nov 72
of the US Army in Indochina, 1942-1945	20 Oct 72
Memo for Bernard Drell from S. Kent, sub: Review of R. Spector, The US	CLASS.: S
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ABSTRACT Army in Indochina 1942-1945 from the point of view of the releasability of certain passages relating to OSS many of which are based upon the OSS archives. Letter to Mr. Lawrence K. White, Exec Dir from James L. Collins, Chief, Military History. Study titled The United States Army in Indo-China 1942-1945.

Traces the formulation of US policy towards continued French control of Indochina. Describes the Japanese takeover of Indochina in Mar 45 and the reluctance of US to assist France in struggle. Vietnam independence proclaimed on 30 August 45.

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